DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 152 EA 025 751

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TITLE Magnet Magic: A Consideration of Choice and Change.
PUB DATE Feb 94
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (New Orleans, LA, February 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Magnet Schools; Middle Schools; Nontraditional Education; Organizational Change; School Restructuring

ABSTRACT

Change theories provide administrators with helpful insight into the "whys" and "hows" of successful magnet program initiation and implementation. Educational change involves two determining factors: direction (movement) and rate (speed). The actual process of change can be divided into phases of adoption, implementation, and incorporation. Numerous authors writing about educational change address the significant roles of consultants, principals, and teachers in the change process. Different definitions of magnet schools are given as well as a history of contemporary magnet schools. A successful magnet school consists of many components, including community involvement, school leadership, clear goals, adequate parental information, and fair admissions process. Proponents of magnet schools identify numerous positive attributes of a magnet school education, such as the remarkable element of choice, better opportunity to match students' interests, and greater professional satisfaction. (Contains 42 references.) (KDP)

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Magnet Magic: A Consideration of Choice and Change- a workshop presented by Alyce Hunter at the National Association of Secondary School Principals Convention- February 1994-

Analysis of school restructuring and of change theories and process can supply insight and enlightenment about each component. However, more importantly, the synthesis of these analyses can reveal the nature of the relationship between these specific theories and actual practice. In other words, the application of change theories to the particular restructuring strategy of magnet school choice can provide an additional way to understand the "whys" and "hows" of successful magnet program initiation and implementation.

Whichever or whenever a choice program, such as magnet schools, is adopted by a school district, the organization itself and individuals (administrators, teacher, students, parent, etc.)

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are involved in the process of changing previous practices and perceptions. The analysis of how organizations and individuals react to, cope with, and manage change is not just a contemporary issue.

The Change Process

Over the past 40 years, a voluminous amount of literature and research has been generated attempting to clarify the meaning of educational change. Despite the diversity among these studies with regards to purposes, procedures and outcomes, it is possible to use some of them to provide an overview of the process of change.

First, it is necessary and important to examine the process of change in a myriad of overlapping and sometimes ambiguous theoretical ways. Change should be considered as occurring simultaneously on two separate yet mutually inclusive levels. Change happens to an organization as well as effecting individuals within that organization (White, 1990). Change also

should be considered as having the two determining factors of direction (movement) and of rate (speed) (Ornstein, 1988). Furthermore, the process itself can be divided into three phases: adoption or initiation of the reform, implementation or initial use of the change, and incorporation or continuation of the innovation (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Fullan, 1991; Giacquinta, 1973). Yet these stages are not separate for Fullan contends that what happens during one phase strongly affects subsequent stages. Moreover, Eastwood and Lewis (1992) maintain that this three phase model is too simplistic because change is "... a learning and growth process with overlapping and interdependent developmental stages" (p 213) .

Educational Change

A wealth of research and descriptive articles exists that detail how significant individuals-consultants, principals, and teachers-have, can, and should initiate and implement school change. For instance, both internal (district curricula

coordinators, program directors, etc.) and external (university and business advisers, etc.) consultants, according to McDonald (1989), can and should provide collaborative assistance that acknowledges the history and values of the change recipients.

Likewise, Margolis (1991) extorts principals to be knowledgeable about individual and organizational factors that could effect the initiation and implementation of an innovation. Thus, in addition to their roles as instructional leaders and supervisors, principals should also function as change facilitators. Hord and Huling-Austin (1986), Miles and Louis (1990), and Possin (1992) all urge principals to adopt behaviors that are conducive to successful school change. Among these appropriate administrative behaviors are the necessities to build a vision, to create a positive environment, and to spend time and money on staff development and training. Jordon (1991) and Tewel (1991) admonish principals to establish systems of communication and evaluation to analyze change

effort. Organizational health, as evidenced by such measures as staff cohesiveness and problem solving ability, is also cited by Clark and Fairman (1983) as an important factor to be considered when an administrator considers change. Finally, while Hall (1988) identifies the principal leadership style of initiator as more conducive to change than the styles of manager or responder, he does agree with Cox (1983) that principals should complement and support teachers and students as they adopt and implement new practices.

Moreover, teachers are paradoxically viewed as both targets and agents of change (Bracey, 1991). White (1990) stresses that the teacher's role as change agent is most important because "it is with the teacher that school improvements occur, not with the specific idea, curricula, organizational or structural change " (p 206). Additionally, McCormick (1986), Simpson (1990), and Goldman and O'Shea (1990) acknowledge the importance of the teacher's

determining role by citing successful programs that empower instructors through participation and collaboration in the initiation and implementation of an innovation.

Furthermore, authors, such as Dennis Sparks in his commentary "13 Tips for Managing Change" in Education Week of June 10, 1992, provide insight into why certain innovations succeed and others fail to be firmly incorporated by and into an organization. For example, innovation should not be the result of reaction but rather of anticipation and planning for future needs. Also, Killian and Harrison (1991) stress the importance of a master plan, that considers the basic soundness of the innovation and appropriateness of its application to a particular situation. The idea that the propensity for accomplishing change is greater if innovations are small scale and incremental is detailed by both Larson (1991) in his study of two Vermont High Schools and in the NAASP Leader's Guide to School Restructuring (1991).

Fullan and Miles (1992) contend that it is necessary for participants to internalize basic knowledge of change practices in order for reform to be effective. They believe that if educators understand the interconnections among seven propositions, that they have identified, change will be accomplished successfully. These seven propositions are: (1) "Change is learning--loaded with uncertainty.", (2) "Change is a journey, not a blueprint.", (3) "Problems are our friends.", (4) "Change is resource-hungry.", (5) "Change requires the power to manage itself.", (6) "Change is systemic.", and (7) "All large-scale change is implemented locally." (pp.749-52). Furthermore, Anderson (1993) has developed a matrix, a continuum of systemic change, to help educators develop a common language and to help them plan strategically for reform. Her matrix includes six stages of change -- maintenance of old system, awareness, exploration, transition, emergence of new infrastructures, and predominance of new system -- and six

elements of the educational system -- vision, public and political support, networking, teaching and learning changes, administrative roles and responsibilities, and policy alignment -- that effect and are effected by change.

Magnet Schools

Perspective can be gained on the magnet school movement by comparing definitions of these schools, considering the history of contemporary magnets with particular emphasis on middle level education, and citing reasons for successful magnet programs.

Definition of Magnet Schools

The magnet school movement in which students and parents are permitted to select the focus of the educational program is a choice offered by some school districts as they attempt to meet their students' diverse needs. Yet this movement is by no means a new and revolutionary approach to educational reform. It has a historical foundation and has been

extensively studied and analyzed with regards to its feasibility and success. Moreover, as one attempts to define this movement, chronicle its history, and delineate the views of educational theorists and researchers, one realizes that controversy abounds.

It would seem that the formal, federal court definition of magnet schools as those "...having a 'distinctive program of study' designed to attract a cross section of students from all racial groups voluntarily" (Peebles, 1982,p.1), would allow for little argument. Yet, researchers such as Doyle and Levine (1983) react to this definition as being too restrictive and contend that the Boston Latin School founded in 1635 was really the first magnet in the United States. They base their conclusion on their own definition of a magnet school as a non-neighborhood school that is selected by parents because of some trait such as an outstanding academic reputation. Also, these researchers identify Dunbar High School, founded in 1870,

as a magnet because black parents were able to select this school for their offspring no matter where they resided in Washington, D.C. However, ironically, entrance requirements for Dunbar High School were indeed highly selective and, therefore, discriminatory because enrollment was limited to only the brightest minority adolescents. Furthermore, after reviewing additional research on contemporary magnet schools, Doyle and Levine reject the elitism implied in these early programs and expand upon the federal definition to describe magnet schools as "district-wide, open-enrollment, institutions, thematically organized, which are largely non-selective" (p.1).

History of Contemporary Magnet Schools

The roots of the contemporary magnet school movement can be traced to the efforts in urban school districts during the late 1960s and the early 1970s to voluntarily reduce racial segregation rather than submit to possible mandatory integration plans. Originally, educators in these districts

selected magnet school themes such as science, mathematics, and performing arts which were reminiscent of those used by highly selective schools such as Bronx School of Science. Next some districts generated and developed themes relative to the interests and needs of students, parents, and communities (Blank et al. 1983).

A boon to the magnet school movement came in 1976 when Congress passed an amendment to the Emergency School Aid Act which specifically allocated money to be utilized by districts for magnet programs as part of the desegregation process. Blank et al. (1983) in their Survey of Magnet Schools: Analyzing a Model for Quality Integrated Education contend that the availability of these funds directly led additional districts to consider and adopt these programs. "...by 1980 over 100 district applications were received by the Department of Education" (p.8). Additionally, these investigators believe that simultaneous to this federal financial infusion, other 1970s

societal trends such as interest in educational options and diversity and increased involvement in community and school concerns led to further magnet development. Thus, by 1983, these theme-based programs existed in all areas of the nation with a particularly high proportion of Southeastern urban districts represented.

Magnet Middle Schools

A variety of configurations have been adopted by school districts as they attempt to provide programs that are academically and developmentally appropriate for middle level learners yet that also emphasize parental choice and magnet offerings. Some magnet middle schools cater to specific populations who have met specific entrance requirements. For example, the Fort Worth Independent School District includes four magnet middle schools designed for gifted and talented adolescents. These are the William James College Readiness Academy, which includes international studies and languages;

the Middle School of Math, Science, and Communication,which emphasizes science and mathematics connections; the Daggett Middle School Montessori, which stresses holistic, child-centered instruction; and the Morningside PreInternational Baccalaureate, which emphasizes community involvement (Roberts, 1992).

Other magnet middle schools, such as the Nicholas Orem Science, Mathematics, and Technology Magnet Program in Prince George's County, Maryland, accept students only on the basis of their interest in "hands-on" technology (Kroto, l988). Likewise, Boston's Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School welcomes all learners into an environment enhanced by school, business, and college partnerships. (Thompson, 1991).

Collaborations also exist between Fendren Middle School in Houston, Texas and Baylor College of Medicine (Miller, LaVois, & Thomson, 1991) and School District #2 in Manhattan, New York and Junior Achievement. Meanwhile, the Lowell, Massachusetts

City Magnet School attempts to meet the needs of adolescents through a participatory program in which students not only learn academics but also are employed, pay taxes, and govern themselves (Richmond, 1989).

Metz (l986) studied three magnet middle schools in an attempt to find out what kinds of experiences they offered learners. Looking at the schools from the adults' point of view, she discussed the organizational character of each by examining the effects of the fictitious Heartland School District on each and by considering technological and logistical influences, faculty culture, and the exercise of power in each building. She found that the alteration of the traditional teaching structure helped learners of racially, socially, and academically diverse backgrounds achieve.

Components of Successful Magnet Schools

A plethora of educators offers both opinions and research findings in their attempts to discern the components of

successful magnet schools. For example, in 1984 Rolf K. Blank in his Phi Delta Kappan article summarized his two year study of magnet programs by identifying district and school leadership and community involvement as important factors needed to produce successful magnets. Additionally, in 1988 the Office of Educational Research and Information in Washington, D.C. published a brief report that expanded upon Blank's findings and summarized other researchers' results to list ten steps to successful magnet choice programs. These steps included not only leadership and community involvement but also mentioned such aspects as clear goals, adequate parental information, fair admissions policies, careful theme selection, sufficient financial resources, necessary transportation, proper staff recruitment and development, and creative opportunities for teachers and administrators. Also, Nathan (1989) stresses that in addition to these components the ability to modify the innovation when necessary is an essential for a successful magnet program.

Proponents of Magnet Schools

Proponents insist that magnet schools should be commended for a variety of reasons. Primarily, the element of choice is remarkable. These programs provide choice in program selection to parents which, according to Blank et al. (1983), leads to increased parental and community commitment. Also this selection based on multiple offerings of thematically organized programs benefits the students by providing a better opportunity to match their interests, needs, and learning styles with an appropriate delivery system. In addition, some districts even permit teachers to choose their magnet which leads to greater professional satisfaction and hence better teaching and learning (Raywid, 1989). Furthermore, specific case study analyses like those by the New York State Education Department (1985) and Clevall and Joy (1990) document that magnet programs can and do effectively increase student achievement and integration while

concurrently decreasing enrollment declines and community concerns about educational quality. Finally, magnets have been credited with reducing school vandalism and violence and with improving students' self images and school attitude (Bryant, 1987).

Conclusion

The relationship and the linkage between definitions descriptions, and research findings relating to educational change and magnet programs can be delineated by considering Inger's (1991) report on magnet schools. The reasons he details for successful magnets can be correlated with some of the aspects of effective change theory and practice. For example, he reports magnets are deemed successful by some because of extreme staff, parental, and student commitment. Likewise, the PSEA School Change Kit (1992) and Fullan(l99l) report that staff ownership (not administrative, autonomous dictum) and commitment are essential to successful change. This same ideal

for change was also mentioned by Chin and Benne(l976) in their normative re-educative design. Most importantly, after one considers both change theory and magnet school development in the abstract, one can consider not only how these abstractions relate to each other but also how they relate to a particular magnet middle school in Franklin Township, New Jersey.

Through the 1990-91 school year the district remained a traditional, neighborhood school system. In September 1991, the seven elementary schools became magnets. Subsequently, in September l992, the one middle school, Sampson G. Smith Intermediate School, offered four magnet programs-fine and performing arts, science and technology, international studies, and humanities- in addition to a traditional program. Adoption of the magnet programs involved changes in such areas as course offerings, teachers' assignments, students' schedules, and class times. Administration, staff, parents, and students

viewed these changes with mixed feelings of exhilaration and apprehension. They were exhilarated to be given the opportunity to restructure their school, but apprehensive to be tinkering with a school and program that had a good reputation in the community. Community, staff, and student meetings were held to explain magnet program theory and practice. However, explanation of the change process would have helped the school and community to cope with the uncertainty and questioning the magnet program produced.

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